

## Letter to the Editor

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1978 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

---

### Recommended Citation

"Letter to the Editor." *The Annals of Iowa* 44 (1978), 414-416.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.8574>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

and as a fugitive came to the United States. Just before coming to Grinnell College in 1903, he again visited Tolstoy, gathering material for a biography of the great man.

Again Sherwood finds a connection between Hopkins' student days at Grinnell and his later enterprises:

Hopkins was permanently influenced by what he learned from Steiner on the Christian ethic and the teachings of Tolstoy. He had *War and Peace* in mind when, in July, 1941, he flew over the vast Russian forests on the way to Moscow when it came the turn of the Soviet Union to face death at the hands of Nazi Germany. (Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, p. 18)

Rader further confuses Steiner and Macy in discussing Hopkins' decision to go to New York after his graduation, stating "Upon graduation, Hopkins considered a journalistic career, but Professor Macy dissuaded him by securing a position for his student at a summer camp for a New York City settlement house." (Rader, *The Annals*, p. 86)

Sherwood, on the other hand, gives Steiner full credit for this decision on Hopkins' part, the turning point in his career:

When Hopkins was about to graduate from Grinnell College, he went around to see Dr. Steiner to say good-by. He had not made up his mind as to his future career; . . . Dr. Steiner showed Hopkins a telegram he had received from Christadora (sic) House, a charitable institution on Avenue B in the New York slums. The telegram asked if Steiner could suggest a Grinnell student to act as counselor that summer at the Christadora camp for poor children near Bound Brook, New Jersey, and Steiner asked Hopkins if he might be interested in this temporary job. (Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, p. 21)

But whether Steiner deserves full credit for Hopkins' decision is open to reconsideration, especially in light of a letter in the Grinnell College archives, which was written in 1956 by Professor Louis D. Hartson, who was on the Grinnell College faculty as its first instructor in psychology from 1911 to 1923. (He left Grinnell to join the faculty of Oberlin College.) He was a graduate of Grinnell in the class of 1908, and wrote the letter to Professor Earl D. Strong, a graduate in the class of 1909, who like Hartson had done graduate work and then returned to Grinnell to teach.

The letter (quoted in its entirety below), was evidently occasioned by the obituary which appeared in the *Des Moines Register* following Dr. Steiner's death. Professor Hartson called attention to his letter in the summer of 1977, when he was ill and in a nursing home in Oberlin (he died on Dec. 18, 1977). He may well have been thinking of his own obituary and wanted his connection with Harry Hopkins given notice.

—Margaret Matlack Kiesel  
Grinnell

Editor's Note: After Frank Rader's article had been set in type for *The Annals*, a new book on Hopkins was published by G. P. Putnam's Sons: *Harry Hopkins*, by Henry H. Adams. Adams states that Hopkins' life work was shaped in part by three members of the Grinnell faculty. In addition to Professors Macy and Steiner, Adams says that Harvard historian, Albert

Bushnell Hart (who was at Grinnell for a year on an exchange professorship), influenced Hopkins to "read history for the rest of his days." (p. 33)

LETTER\*

P.O. Box 256  
Northville, New York  
July 12, 1956

Prof. Earl D. Strong  
Grinnell, Iowa

Dear Earl:

*You will be surprised to hear from me at all, but especially for the reason which prompts this communication. I would like to have you file in the college archives a statement which, although of no momentous importance, appears to be of some interest to the writers of obituaries. I refer to statements that have appeared in print concerning the manner in which Harry L. Hopkins got started in the field of social work.*

*I suppose there is no question but that Doctor Steiner had some influence in Harry's decision to go into social work, although it is probable that the fact that his sister, Adah, was happily at work in that area and, as Registrar of the School of Philanthropy, was in position to be of some assistance in helping one make useful job contacts, should be given some credit. And it would appear to be fair to say also that Harry was probably influenced by the fact that, some time before he graduated from Grinnell, he had a specific offer to work immediately thereafter at Northover Camp, at Bound Brook, New Jersey.*

*In the autumn of 1908, and upon the recommendation of Adah Hopkins Aimee, I obtained a position in residence at Christodora House, (the correct spelling) where I lived for two years, and during that first year I introduced Dr. Steiner to the headworker, Miss C. I. MacColl. During the summers of 1909, 1910, 1912, 1915 and 1918, I was one of the workers at the settlement's summer camp at Bound Brook.*

*One day during the spring of 1912, I asked Harry Hopkins, as he stopped to talk after class, what he intended to do after graduation. He responded that he was planning to enter social work. I asked him whether he would be interested in living at Christodora House, and suggested that it might be possible that I could get him a job at Northover Camp for the summer. He said that this would be just fine. I therefore wrote to Miss MacColl recommending Harry, and he was given work at the camp as director of the Junior Boys work. (I was to have charge of the senior boys.)*

*Very shortly after Commencement, Harry and I went to New York together and thence to Bound Brook. This is the point at which my account differs from the one printed in connection with the obituary printed in the*

\*Letter printed with permission of Grinnell College Archives, Anne G. Kintner, Archivist.

*Des Moines Register on the occasion of Dr. Steiner's death. The statement in the Register is that Harry first went to Montana and worked as a newspaper reporter, and only later went to New York to enter upon social work.*

*If Harry were living, I am sure he would recall that it was on this trip to New York that he first visited Washington. For we traveled via the B. & O. and stopped over for three days in the Capital. We went naturally to the Capitol Building, out to Mt. Vernon, where I recall lying out on the lawn overlooking the Potomac and we saw what visitors were permitted to see of the White House, the residence with which Harry was to become so intimately acquainted years later.*

*Then we went to Baltimore, where the Democratic Party convention was in session. We spent two days there at the convention hall and in the hotel lobbies. I remember particularly Harry's conversation with the Tammany delegates who were supporting Mayor Gaynor, and his putting in a word in favor of Woodrow Wilson.*

*We also made a brief stopover in Philadelphia, where we took time to visit Independence Hall. One reason why I have not forgotten this stop in Philadelphia is the fact that we had failed to get the proper signature from the conductor permitting this interruption of our journey. As a result, we had to pay extra for the last lap of our trip to New York.*

*In a few days, we both went out to Bound Brook where we spent the summer. Incidentally, one of the entertainments which we staged that summer was a mock political convention.*

*After Labor Day, Harry went to reside at Christodora House. And it was there that he met and fell in love with Ethal Gross, whom he later married. The rest of his story has been correctly recorded, so far as I know, in Sherwood's book, Roosevelt and Hopkins.*

*I presume that the college has some sort of a file on Harry Hopkins in the archives. I would appreciate having this statement added to the collection. . . .*

*Yours sincerely,  
Louis D. Hartson*

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.